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ABSTRACT

The immediate family of an elderly person is often a major social support, and the major responsibility for care of the aged has fallen traditionally to female family members. Since more women today are working, they may have less time for such family responsibilities. To examine the effects of daughters' employment on their helping behaviors toward elderly parents, data from a sample of adults (N=321) living in a rural transitional area were analyzed. Only respondents with daughters were included. Parents (N=142) completed questionnaires covering general information, work and retirement, health, family, activities and roles, and subjective well-being. A multiple regression analysis of data revealed that employment patterns of daughters were of no relative importance to the helping behaviors given to older parents, when several physical and social variables were controlled (sex, age, marital status, self-perceived health, parent's ability to get around; residential propinquity; filial expectations; and daughter's marital status). Marital status of the parent and filial expectations had a positive relationship with helping behaviors given by daughters, while residential propinquity and the parent's ability to get around were inversely related to helping behaviors. (NRB)

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THE IMPACT OF DAUGHTERS' EMPLOYMENT ON SUPPORT GIVEN TO OLDER PARENTS[1]

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The elderly population is on the rise resulting in an increased concern over the helping patterns of the elderly's children. Old people turn first to families for help, then to neighbors, and finally bureaucratic replacements for families, social workers, ministers, and community agencies (Shanas, 1979). Data from a 1975 national survey of noninstitutionalized community aged (N = 5755) indicated that the immediate family of the old person, husbands, wives, and children is the major social support of elderly in time of illness. Presence of immediate relatives makes it possible for bedfast persons to live outside of institutions and supply housebound and ambulatory aged with care for occasional illness. The extended family of elderly persons, children, siblings, and other relatives, through face-to-face visits is a major tie of elderly to the community (Shanas, 1979).

Families, according to Troll (1971), seem to be linked through females. The major responsibility for psychological sustenance and physical maintenance of the aged has fallen traditionally to female members of the family (Treas, 1977). When older family members need a great deal of help, most of that help is provided by female members, most often a wife for a man and a daughter for a woman (Troll, 1982). Major contributors of help given to older parents are daughters (Lopata, 1973; Morgan, 1981; Treas, 1977; Troll, 1982). In Lopata's study (1973) of Chicago area widows, most of the widows found their sons helpful in managing funeral arrangements and financial matters while daughters fostered closer emotional ties by giving services and visiting. Daughters have been the mainstay of family support systems by taking widowed mothers into their homes, running errands, and providing custodial care.

Postwar years have shown a dramatic change in the social roles of women in the U. S. Increasing numbers of women are employed outside the home for significant portions of their adult lives (Treas, 1977). The fact that more women

are working full or part-time means that they have less time to devote to family responsibilities, which could include maintaining contact with and support for parents or other older family members (Morgan, 1981). Lang and Brody's (1983) three generational study of 161 middle-aged daughters found that working women provided fewer hours of help to older parents than nonworking women (6.2 hours, 12.5 hours respectively). According to Treas (1977), women have been described as the "kin-keepers" of our culture because they have usually been responsible for maintaining contact with relatives and for arranging family functions. Gerontologists are questioning what happens to kin-keeping activities when women have careers that demand their time and energy.

The purposes of the present study were: (1) to determine if daughters' employment affects their helping behaviors toward their elderly parents with the following variables held as controls: sex, age, self-perceived health, and ability to get around of the older adult, residential propinquity, and marital status of the older adult, filial expectations, and marital status of the daughters; and (2) to determine the relative importance of the independent variables to helping behaviors given to older adults by their daughters.

PROCEDURES

Sample

This study is a secondary analysis of data from 321 adults aged 65 and older living in a rural transitional area situated in the Piedmont Plain of North Carolina. For purposes of this study only respondents with daughters were included, N = 142 (48 males; 94 females). The mean age of the sample was 75 years. Approximately 73% of the sample reported average to excellent health. Adequate and above adequate income was reported by 80% of the sample. Approximately 54% of the sample was married with 38% being widowed and 8% being single or separated/divorced.

Approximately 87% of the daughters of most contact were married, with 71% being employed. The mean age of the daughters was 49 years and their mean educational level was 13 years.

Measurement

A 141-item questionnaire was administered by trained interviewers to all persons 65 and older living in the selected areas and agreeing to participate. The questionnaire covered the following areas: general information, work and retirement, health, family, activities and roles, and subjective well-being. Only those data relevant to the present analysis are reported.

The dependent measure, helping behaviors, was determined by a composite of help received and help given. Each scale, in its original form, consisted of 11 helping behaviors that included financial aid, illness, and household chores. The subjects were asked how often their child helped with the above activities and how often they helped their child within the past year. Responses were (1) never, (2) less than once a year, (3) once a year, (4) several times a year, (5) once a month, (6) several times a month, (7) once a week, (8) several times a week, and (9) daily. A factor analysis of the scale showed it could be reduced to three factors, two of help given and one of help received. This study dealt only with help received by the older adult from their daughters of most contact.

The independent measures included the following: sex of the older adult was treated as a dummy variable with males receiving a code of 1 and females a 2; age of the older adult was the age at the time of the interview; self-rated health of the older adult was measured through the use of the Cantril Ladder technique in which the older adult was shown a ladder with rungs numbered from zero to nine, with zero representing most serious illness and nine representing perfect health; ability to get around was determined by answers to questions on the extent to which the older adult could get around (go any place, get around

the house but seldom go out, get around the house with difficulty, confined to chair, confined to bed); residential propinquity referred to the nearness of the residence of the closest daughter and was measured by how long it takes to get from one residence to the other; adequacy of income was a measure of how far the respondent perceived his/her money as going--not enough for needs, enough if careful, enough for everything; marital status of the older adult was treated as a dummy variable noting the status of the older adult (married, single/widowed/separated/divorced) with married treated as the referent); filial expectations was a composite of ways in which the older adult felt the daughter was responsible to older relatives (illness, financial aid, visitation); marital status of daughter was treated as a dummy variable noting the status of the daughter (married, single/widowed/separated/divorced) with married treated as the referent); employment patterns of the daughter was treated as a dummy variable noting whether or not the daughter was employed (0 = unemployed; 1 = employed).

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

A multiple regression analysis with temporally ordered control variables was used to determine if there were significant differences in helping behaviors given to older adults by daughters who worked versus daughters who did not work. The control variables were nine physical and social variables: age, sex, self-perceived health, and ability to get around of the older adult, residential propinquity, adequacy of income, marital status of the older adult, filial expectations, and marital status of daughters. The major independent variable of interest, employment patterns of daughters, was entered into the model following the control variables. An analysis of variance was used to measure the relationship between the employment patterns of daughters and helping behaviors given by daughters to their elderly parents. Frequencies for certain variables were computed for descriptive purposes.

As observed in Table 1, 66% of the sample was female and 34% male. The mean age of the sample was 75 years. Approximately 73% of the sample reported average to excellent health with 74% reporting the ability to go anywhere with little difficulty. Enough income for everything needed was reported by 40%, with another 40% reporting they usually had enough. Approximately 54% were married, 38% widowed, and 8% single, separated/divorced. Approximately 68% of the sample reported being within one hour of their daughter of most contact. Of the daughters, 87% were married, 71% were employed, their mean educational level was 13 years, and their mean age was 49 years.

[Place Table 1 about here]

The multiple regression analysis (Table 2) revealed that employment patterns of daughters was of no relative importance to the helping behaviors given to older parents, when age, sex, self-perceived health, and ability to get around of the older adult, residential propinquity, adequacy of income, marital status of the older adult, filial expectations, and marital status of daughters were controlled. A significant amount of variance was explained in helping behaviors given by the model ($R^2 = .25$, $p < .0001$). However, this was largely attributed to four control variables: marital status of the older adult, residential propinquity, filial expectations, and ability to get around. Marital status and daughter expectations had a positive relationship with helping behaviors given by daughters. In other words, when the older adult was single and had high expectations of their daughters, daughters gave more help. Residential propinquity and ability to get around were inversely related to helping behaviors. When the parents lived close to their daughters and did not have the ability to get around, more help was given by daughters.

[Place Table 2 about here]

Additional analysis further substantiated the finding that employment of daughters was of no relative importance to help given older parents. An analysis of variance between the two groups of daughters (unemployed, employed) and helping behaviors revealed no significant relationship between employment of daughters and their helping behaviors toward their older parents.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, results from this study revealed that employment patterns of daughters, when controlling for several physical and social variables, was of no relative importance to help given older parents by daughters. This is in contradiction to the recent finding by Lang and Brody (1983) in their three-generational study of 161 middle-aged daughters, that working daughters decrease the amount of help they give to their older parents. Another finding which did not support the literature was with regard to the marital status of daughters. Uhlenberg (1974) has claimed that spinsterhood declined from 10 to 4.5% for those surviving from ages 20 to 50 and that the percentage of childless marriages has also declined from 22.5 to 5.5%. This has left us with a shortage of "maiden aunts." In other words, our supply of "kin-keepers" has declined. This study found no differences in helping patterns of married versus unmarried daughters. There was support of the literature with regard to other variables that significantly contributed to helping behaviors given by daughters to their older parents: residential propinquity, ability to get around, filial expectations, and marital status of older adults.

Results from the study suggest that employment patterns of daughters may not significantly affect the help given to older parents by their daughters and demonstrate the need for further investigation into the possible effects of residential propinquity, ability to get around, filial expectations, and marital status of the older adult on the helping patterns of daughters.

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*Books are currently checked out of library; therefore, page numbers are missing at present.

Table 1. Older Adults and Daughters According to Selected Characteristics

Variable	% (N = 142)
Sex	
Male	34
Female	66
Marital Status	
Married	54
Widowed	38
Single, Separated/Divorced	8
Health (Older Adult)	
Above Average	60
Below Average	40
Income	
Enough	40
Usually Enough	40
Not Enough (Seldom/Never)	20
Marital Status (Daughters)	
Married	87
Unmarried	13
Employment	
Employed	71
Unemployed	29
	Mean Years
Age	
Older Adults	75
Daughters	49
Education	
Daughters	13

Table 2. Contributors to Helping Behaviors Given to Older Adults by Daughters

Variable	B[a]	R^2	R^2 Change
Ability to Get Around	-.20*	.14	.03
Residential Propinquity	-.20*	.18	.04
Marital Status	.28**	.23	.06
Daughter Expectations	.19*	.26	.04

R^2 = .25 df = 9,121 F = 5.84***

(N = 142)

[a]Beta refers to Standardized Betas

*p < .01

**p < .001

***p < .0001